



## (U) Now You're Speaking My Language: NSA's Linguistic Resources (Part I) - repost

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*(U) To mark the Foreign Language Conference this week, we are reposting our series of articles on language development at NSA. Here's part one...*

(S) " NSA/CSS does not have enough Cryptologic Language Analysts with the skill level necessary to prosecute cryptologic language missions, especially in the Global War on Terrorism ." This statement is the opening line of an NSA report to the Joint Requirements Oversight Council on the status of our language capabilities. The ability to understand a target's language is more crucial than it has ever been, and this shortcoming must be rectified. In this special mini-series, we'll look at the nature of the problem and describe some of the NSA/CSS initiatives to fix it.

(C) First, what kinds of cryptologic language skills does the SIGINT System need? The NSA/CSS Senior Language Authority (SLA), together with target offices and experts, documents all cryptologic language missions worldwide (2300+), along with the [language skill level](#) required to prosecute those missions. **Currently 85% of the NSA/CSS cryptologic missions require a skill level of 3 or better** , meaning that the cryptologic language analyst must be able to read and listen "between the lines" to unformatted, unpredictable discourse that includes analysis, commentary, opinion, arguments, diplomatic exchanges, and extended outbursts. In addition to the level-3 nature of the discourse itself, the language analyst, as the unintended recipient of the message, must deal with "Signals Intelligence factors" such as garbled text, incomplete messages, lack of redundancy in the exchange, uncertain context, and distortion. The demands on the language analyst are high.

(S) The SLA also maintains a real-time Language Readiness Index (LRI), which shows the percentage of cryptologic language missions being prosecuted by "qualified" language analysts. (There are over 6500 Cryptologic Language Analysts - CLAs - worldwide.) CLAs are considered "qualified" if their language test scores are equal to or higher than the language level required for their job. The overall worldwide LRI is 51%, with 80% representing a minimum acceptable risk. In other words, **only half of the missions are being prosecuted by qualified personnel** .

(C) The number of mission areas that demand high-level language proficiency continues to increase, with over 25% of current cryptologic missions requiring a level higher than 3, requiring the CLA to read and listen "beyond the lines." The language level for many missions, particularly those related to counterterrorism and force protection, continues to be measured at the extremely difficult 4/4+ level because the targets "talk around" the subject and use what appears to be almost gibberish metalanguage and idiolects. Targets are communicating via a variety of 21st century technologies, using very colloquial speech and writing in their particular dialects, rather than the standard written language.

(C) The 2/2 language standard of yesterday can no longer suffice to provide the actionable intelligence that is critically needed to support our troops and high-level policy leaders. In April 2002, DIRNSA documented for the record that the operational standard required for NSA/CSS cryptologic language work is level 3/3. (See [announcement](#) .)

(C) As you can see, the demands are great... but NSA/CSS is taking steps to get the language capabilities it needs. Read about some of them in part II, coming soon.

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